

Social Identity Groups

Social identity groups are based on the physical, social, and mental characteristics of individuals. They are sometimes obvious and clear, sometimes not obvious and unclear, often self-claimed and frequently ascribed by others. For example, racial groupings are often ascribed as well as self-claimed. Government, schools, and employers often ask an individual to claim a racial identity group or simply ascribe one to an individual based on visual perception. Other social identities are personally claimed but not often announced or easily visually ascribed such as sexual orientation, religion, or disability status.

For this self-examination please identify the memberships you claim or those ascribed to you. Below are examples of social identity groupings. Since issues of social identity often are the basis of social conflict, it is reasonable to expect that even the terms we use to describe them may cause disagreement. Feel free to use your own preferred terms for the material below.

Examples

(Feel free to use your own language for your identities.)

Gender: Woman, Man, Transgender, Post-Gender

Sex: Intersex, Female, Male

Race: Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Latinx, Black, White, Bi/Multiracial

Ethnicity: Irish, Chinese, Puerto Rican, Italian, Mohawk, Jewish, Guatemalan, Lebanese, European-American

Sexual Orientation: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Heterosexual, Pan-Attractional, Asexual, Queer, Questioning

Religion/Spirituality: Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Pagan, Agnostic, Atheist, Secular Humanist

Social Class: Poor, Working Class, Lower-Middle Class, Upper-Middle Class, Ruling Class

Age: Child, Young Adult, Middle-Aged, Adult, Senior

(Dis)Ability: People with disabilities (cognitive, physical, emotional, etc.), temporarily able-bodied, temporarily disabled

Nation(s) of Origin and/or Citizenship: United States, Nigeria, Korea, Turkey, Argentina

Tribal or Indigenous Affiliation: Mohawk, Aboriginal, Navajo, Santal

Body Size: Fat, Person of Size, Thin

Marginalized Group: social identity groups that are disenfranchised, disadvantaged, and exploited

Privileged Group: social identity groups that hold unearned privilege and advantages in society

Social Identity Worksheet

One of the first steps we must take when learning about systemic inequality and why it is crucial to intentionally design equitable learning and working environments, is to reflect on our own social identities. These identities are shaped by common history, shared experiences, legal and historical decisions, and day-to-day interactions. Our social identities situate us in certain positions that provide us with advantages and disadvantages in different contexts. These social positions and related experiences consequently shape our perspectives, assumptions, and attitudes about the world and those around us.

This exercise is intended to help you to reflect on your social positionality in society in general, and in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields in particular— and how these social positions may influence your perspectives and interactions with students and colleagues from backgrounds different than yours.

Fill in your social identity for each of the categories listed (note: this sheet will not be collected).

Gender	Race	Ethnicity	Socioeconomic Class
Sexual Orientation	Dis/Ability	Religious/Spiritual Affiliation	Age
National Origin	First Language	Other	Other

Given the identities you listed, please reflect on the following questions:

1) Which identities do you think about most often? Why?

2) Which identities do you think about least often? Why?

3) Which identities have the strongest effect on how you perceive yourself? Why?

4) Which identities have the greatest effect on how others perceive you? Why?

5) Think back to your time as a STEM student— which identities were most salient to you in your field? Why?

6) Which of your identities seemed to be more salient to others you interacted with in your field? Why?

7) How are your answers to questions 5 and 6 the same or different from the identities most salient to you in your field today?